

## ***Nikiut 2– Cleanliness***

*Let no stain or ugliness be found in your possessions or in your home,  
and surely not on your body or clothes<sup>1</sup>.*

While *nikiut* is concerned with external appearances first, it also refers to cultivating cleanliness or dignity internally as well. What does this mean? What are the “stains” or instances of “ugliness” that can mar the “appearance” of the inner life or soul? Our inner life is, first and foremost, defined by thoughts. ugly thoughts, thoughts that stain the soul, must be understood as those thoughts which precisely serve the self at the expense of the other. When our minds and hearts combine to produce thoughts which aggrandize ourselves as against producing a sense of obligation to welcome the entry of the other, when our thoughts guide us to close that space that we’ve described as the *yetzer tov* in favor of the *yetzer hara*, then we have sullied our soul. Such interior uncleanness is quite often concretized by the use of unclean language, even when that language is not outwardly articulated. The presence of such language in our mind or on our lips is always a sign of uncleanness despite the fact that it is so ubiquitous as to be considered inoffensive. When we refer to others or the situations for which we hold others responsible with obscene or scatological language, whether spoken or thought, we are participating in the uncleanness of the soul. Such participation can occur, of course, even without the use of such language, but the use of such language is an undeniable sign of such uncleanness of spirit and should not be ignored even if it seems unavoidable.

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<sup>1</sup> Rabbi Mendel of Satanov. (1845). *Chesbon ha-Nefesh*. (D. Landesman, trans.) Feldheim Publishers, New York, 1995. Page 141.